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ABSTRACT

Urban public education needs to be improved, and the superintendent is the key to improvement. Because the public influences school quality, the superintendent must deal with the public and with political leaders and officials. Hence the superintendent must be a community leader and should meet and work with the city's mayor. Mayors are aware that public school quality affects the city's tax base and its financial burdens. In Chicago, the public schools also work with a business advisory group and with individual businesses that adopt schools. The superintendent also must be a coordinator and leader and must communicate with the public (through the media) as well as maintain communication with representatives of different economic, cultural, ethnic, and other groups. The superintendent today is more dependent on other governmental agencies, too, for security and safety. Because of the schools' financial needs, the superintendent must also be involved in getting grants. Support for public education from mayors and other city officials is vital to schools and needs to be demonstrated. (RW)

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MAYORS AND SUPERINTENDENTS: WHAT TECHNIQUES MIGHT BE USED TO IMPROVE PARTNERSHIPS

"Education in the big cities is on trial as never before.... If we cannot find ways of significantly improving education in the big cities, public education may well be replaced by some other arrangement.... The only solution is massive and significant improvements in the education of our children."[1] The key person to these improvements is the superintendent, who must make the public aware of the symbiotic relationship between the city and its public schools.

Because the superintendent is an official in a democratic society, the public's views must be considered. There are practical reasons to do so: the people's views influence the quality of the schools. In particular, the public tolerance is an essential foundation of academic freedom. The role of the schools in social change and the

[1] Richard I. Miller, The Seat of Heat: The Big City Superintendency (Dayton: The Mead Corp., 1970).

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impact of social change on the schools are so deep that educational leadership must be involved in areas other than school policy. The schools must be involved in the development of policies affecting the life of the total society. The superintendent's role is so central in the community, and the schools' needs are so dependent on the political process for satisfaction, that he/she works constantly with public office holders and political party leaders at the local, state, and national levels.[2]

The superintendent's role as educational leader must, therefore, imply community leadership. His/her major task is to constantly remind the city and its political leaders that the school system is part of the fabric of the city. Through periodic meetings with the mayor, the superintendent must keep the mayor apprised of both the problems and progress of the schools.

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[2]The Unique Role of the Superintendent of Schools (Washington: Educational Policies Commission, NEA, 1965).

The mayor and other elected officials are aware that the quality of the public schools affects the tax base--it affects the number of people who are willing to live and work in the city. When people flee to suburban and private schools because of dissatisfaction with the public schools, they seriously affect the municipal financial overburden.

The superintendent's involvement in community affairs includes participation in community organizations, involvement with the business and industrial community, communication with the media and public leaders, and integration of school and community resources.[3]

In Chicago, the public schools work closely with Chicago United, an advisory group comprised of the business leaders of the city. In addition, we have enrolled over 60 businesses and industries in our Adopt-a-School Program.

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[3]Joseph M. Appel, "Yearly Evaluation: A Key in Assessing Superintendent," Thrust for Educational Leadership, January 1980.

Each firm is committed to providing some form of assistance to a particular school in the city. These businessmen understand that the city's future is closely tied to its schools, and they are willing to join in our task of educating students who are able to join the work force with the necessary basic skills to function in today's world.

Designed as a position of educational leadership, the general superintendency is now more significantly marked as a position of coordination and leadership, rather than one of independent leadership. Since 1954, the American school superintendency, as well as other governmental positions, has been greatly affected by the right to know, and the media's assumption of responsibility for keeping them informed.[4]

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[4] Educational Administration, ed. by L.V. Cunningham, et al. (Proceedings of a Career Development Conference sponsored by The University Council for Educational Administration and The Ohio State University) (Berkeley, Calif.: McCutchan Pub. Corp., 1977).

In his/her role as a coordinator of influential groups and the orchestrator of diverse interests and demands made upon the school, the superintendent must maintain communication with various levels of power figures representing different economic, cultural, ethnic, racial, religious, and employment sectors. His/her primary skills must be the skills of political compromise, accommodation, negotiation, management of conflict, and persuasion.[5]

Although the Board of Education is a legally independent governmental agency, the superintendent is more dependent on other governmental agencies than was the case 20 years ago. Closer relations with local and state agencies are necessary because of the urgency of such problems as security of buildings, maintaining safe conditions in areas surrounding schools, and operating various functions in accordance with laws and regulations.[6]

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

Since the financing of school programs becomes more of a problem daily, the superintendent has to be involved in grantsmanship. The availability of funds for special purposes of vital concern necessitates that efforts be made to obtain the district's fair share.[7]

The support of the mayor and other public officials is vital to the well-being of the schools. By visiting schools, by issuing statements of support for public education, by supporting the schools in their fiscal needs, these officials strengthen the public schools and make it possible for the general superintendent and his/her staff to achieve their goal of providing the best possible education to every child.

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[7] Ibid.